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Dear Friend,

This week, I supported four bills that make good on our promises to America's veterans.

I voted for the Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations bill which included a \$3.9 billion increase for veterans' health care.

Last year, Democrats in Congress passed the single largest funding increase in the 77- year history of the VA. This legislation builds on that record by providing even more resources to care for the men and women that served our nation in uniform.

In addition, I strongly supported legislation to overhaul the Department of Veterans' Affairs broken disability claims process, easing the road to treatment for hundreds of thousands of our nation's veterans. The VA currently has a backlog of more than 800,000 claims and it is expected to surpass 1 million by 2009.

The Veterans Disability Benefits Claims Modernization Act would instantly pay partial claims for severely wounded veterans, completely overhaul the prehistoric ratings schedule which has contributed to the size and scope of the backlog, and repair the flawed and broken system of processing claims.

Our wounded warriors deserve the best healthcare money can buy, not mountains of unnecessary paperwork and miles of red tape.

I am very proud that the House passed, with wide bipartisan support, legislation I authored to allow veterans' families to receive mental health counseling and other support services from the VA.

Current law allows the VA to provide professional counseling, consultation, training and mental health services to the immediate family members of veterans being treated for service-connected conditions when such services are deemed necessary for the veteran's treatment. However, with respect to other veterans, the statute states that the VA may only provide such services when they are initiated during a period of hospitalization. My bill—the Mental Health for Heroes' Families Act—eliminates that hospitalization requirement.

Veterans and their families deserve all the help we can give them, no matter how they were injured or where they were treated.

The House also passed, with my strong support, legislation creating a pilot program to allow veterans living in areas defined as "very rural" to receive their healthcare from non-VA providers, rather than having to travel long distances to see a doctor.

This is the first step toward dramatically improving care for thousands of veterans living in rural communities in the 17th District.

There is no way we can ever truly repay our servicemen and women for the sacrifices they make. But we can do everything in our power to help them live happy, healthy, and productive lives upon returning home.

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travel long distances
to see a doctor?**

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